

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5521

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD UNN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 9597

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LE

SUBJECT: NATIONAL CHARTER COMES UNDER INCREASING SCRUTINY

REF: (A) BEIRUT 9292; (B) BEIRUT 9571

1. PROMINENT FIGURES BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT HAVE EXPRESSED OPINIONS RECENTLY ON THE VIABILITY OF THE NATIONAL CHARTER. ITS DELICATE CONFESSIONAL BALANCE, ESSENTIALLY UNCHANGED SINCE 1943, IS UNDER INCREASING ATTACK. THE COMMENTS OF PRIMIN KARAME URGING ITS ALTERATION ARE REPORTED IN REF B. THE EARLIER REMARKS OPPOSING ALTERATION BY TONY FRANGIE, THE PRESIDENT'S SON, ARE IN REF A. OTHER SIGNIFICANT VIEWS FOLLOW BELOW:

-- DECLARATION OF THE CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS AND BISHOPS: MEETING FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE RECENT TROUBLES, LEBANON'S LEADING MARONITE AND OTHER CATHOLIC PRELATES ISSUED A STATEMENT JULY 22 THAT WAS WIDELY HAILED FOR ITS EVEN-HANDEDNESS IN BLAMING BOTH
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THE "ADVENTUROUSLY REVOLUTIONARY LEFT" AND THE "TENACISOULY

REACTIONARY RIGHT" FOR THE CIVIL STRIFE. EVEN THE SUNNI MUFTI LATER PRAISED THE DECLARATION. HOWEVER, ONE IDEA ON WHICH THE CATHOLIC PRELATES WERE NOT DISPOSED TO COMPROMISE WAS THE SUGGESTION THAT THE NATIONAL CHARTER SHOULD BE SCRAPPED. THEY STRONGLY OPPOSED THIS PROPOSAL, ASKING RHETORICALLY: "IS NOT OUR LEBANESE FORMULA STILL A MODEL FOR ALL COUNTRIES OF MULTIPLE RELIGIONS?"

-- KAMAL JUMBLATT: THE DRUZE LEADER OF THE LEFTIST PSP, KAMAL JUMBLATT, DELIVERED HIMSELF OF A WIDE RANGE OF VIEWS IN AN INTERVIEW WITH "AS SAFIR" PUBLISHED JULY 28. AMONG OTHER THINGS, HE STRESSED THAT CONFESSIONALISM SHOULD BE ELIMINATED FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTORAL SYSTEM. HE CHARGED THAT CHRISTIAN RIGHTISTS HOPE TO TRANSFORM LEBANON INTO A CHRISTIAN STATE, WHICH HE CLAIMED VIOLATED THE NATION'S HISTORIC FORMULA OF EQUAL STATUS FOR ALL GROUPS. JUMBLATT REFERRED IN THIS INTERVIEW TO BOTH HIS STATUS AS A DRUZE AND HIS POSITION AS A LEFTIST LEADER, DRAWING ON BOTH IN A SOMEWHAT CONTRADICTORY FASHION TO CRITICIZE CONFESSIONALISM AS CURRENTLY PRACTICED IN LEBANON.

-- CAMILLE CHAMOUN: INTMIN CAMILLE CHAMOUN WAS QUOTED IN RIGHTIST "AL HAYAT" JULY 28 AS STATING THAT A CHANGE OF THE NATIONAL CHARTER WOULD SERIOUSLY SPLIT THE COUNTRY.

2. COMMENTS:

-- IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE RECENT CIVIL STRIFE HAS NARROWED DOWN TO A CONTROVERSY OVER THE NATIONAL CHARTER, WHICH ORIGINALLY COMBINED LEBANESE INDEPENDENCE, CHRISTIAN PRE-EMINENCE, AND AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT LEBANON IS AN ARAB STATE. THE VARIOUS ISSUES RAISED IN THE RECENT DISORDERS-- PHALANGIST NATIONALISM VS. THE PALESTINIANS, LEBANESE CONFESSIONAL HOSTILITY, AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INJUSTICE-- CAN ALL BE VIEWED AS FACETS OF THE WAY THE NATIONAL CHARTER HAS WORKED ITSELF OUT OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS. WE EXPECT TO SEE A LOT MORE DEBATE ABOUT THE CHARTER IN THE COMING MONTHS.
GODLEY

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